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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of family structure and grandmother's residence on familial and adult-child interaction and patterns of conversation during evening meals. A total of 50 black families participated in four videotaped sessions. The unit of analysis was a randomly selected 2-minute interval during which speakers were identified. A contingency table analysis that controlled for family structure was computed to compare the likelihood of adult-adult, adult-child, child-adult, and child-child speakerships. In all family situations, mothers were the center of conversations. Findings indicated that children tended to interact more often with mothers than with anyone else, and less often with each other. Mothers interacted more often with children, except in single-parent-with-grandmother families, in which adult-adult patterns were more frequent. The dyadic asymmetric interaction patterns in which two family members completely dominated conversations were evident in the single-parent-with-grandmother families. The focal asymmetric interaction pattern in which a single family member was the focus of attention was found in single-mother-alone families. It is concluded that additional research on the content of interaction patterns should be conducted. Communication styles can be used in the process of determining the quality of family relations in different family types. Cited are 42 references. (Author/RH)

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An Analysis of Adult-Child Interaction Patterns in Diverse Black Families

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Abstract

This study considered the effect of family type on familial and adult-child interaction patterns of conversation during evening meals. Fifty Black families completed a four separate occasions of videotaping their evening meal. The unit of analysis was a randomly selected two minute interval. The data was coded in each time frame by scoring the person who spoke as speaker. Contingency table analysis (Allison & Liker, 1982) was computed to compare the likelihood of adult-adult, adult-child, child-adult, and child-child speakerships controlling for family structure. Children tended to interact more often with their mothers than anyone else, and less often with each other. Mothers interacted more often with children, except in single-parent-with-grandmother families where adult-adult patterns were more frequent. The dyadic asymmetric interaction pattern in which two family members completely dominate conversations is evident in the single-parent-with-grandmother families; and the focal asymmetric interaction pattern in which a single family member is the focus of attention was found in single-mother-alone families. More research should be conducted aimed at studying the contend of the interaction patterns. Communication styles can be used in determining the quality of family relations in different family types.

An Analysis of Adult-Child Interaction Patterns in Diverse Black Families

Early research using the American ideal of the nuclear family raised grave concerns that many Black family units lack sufficient adult resources to manage adequately childrearing tasks. Within the context that a family consist of a mother, father and their children, single-parent family units are seen as deviant from this ideal family form. In fact, past and present demographic reports reveal that a significant proportion of the families in the Black community are single-parent units (Reid, 1982; Sweet, 1977). Currently, 47% of Black families are composed of mother and her children (U.S. Census Bureau, 1989). Therefore, from a White American perspective, Black families who are single-parent family units reflect both the relative and general concerns which this familial composition and structure could have on the development of American children.

However, although many Black children live in single-parent families, it is not accurate to presume that the children are living in one-adult households (Allen, 1979; McAdoo, 1980; Myers, 1982). Black single-parent families are likely to live in an extended family household (Hofferth, 1984). More importantly, an additional adult in a single-parent household can affect the perception of adult-child interactions (Wilson, 1984), family environment (Tolson & Wilson, 1990), and childcare and household duties (Wilson, Tolson, Hinton, & Kiernan, 1990). In many instances, the presence of a second adult is essential to the family's well being. Thus, the main question raised in this study is the effect of diverse Black families on the actual familial and adult-child interactions.

As reflected by familiar settings, enduring relationships, mutual influences, and shared experiences, the familial context is central to understanding family interaction and process (Wilson, 1989). It is not simply determining family behavior from the perspective of a particular family member or a subsystem of the family; in order to fully appreciate family life it is necessary to understand the family's entire exchange and interrelationship (Lewis & Feiring, 1982). Ironically, most of the studies on Black family life have relied on self-report measures that focus on an individual perspective to assess familial interaction and networks. In contrast, social interaction methodology assumes that social acts and personality cannot be understood independently of the social context in which they occurred because of the ongoing interchanges between the person and his/her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cairns, 1979; Lewis & Feiring, 1982; Rappaport, 1977). Social interaction analysis is an attempt to discern functional relationships between one person's action and another's reaction. Basically, the unit of analysis for social interaction is the sequence of behavioral events occurring in any social interchange.

Most work using social interaction analysis have involved investigation of the dyadic relationship, especially parent-child and marital dyads. Because of the amount of time that mothers are involved during early caregiver-infant interaction, research on adult-child interaction has generally focused on the mother-child dyad. For example, mother-child attachment has been classified according to categories representing the extent of mother's responsiveness to her infant's signals (Ainsworth, 1979). These classifications have been associated with social competence and achievement in later years and have been used to screen for neglectful mothers (Crittenden, 1988).

Although research on father-child interaction has only recently begun, nevertheless, the limited research suggests that fathers and mothers bring different styles to the interaction with children (Lamb, 1980; Parke, 1979; Parke, Powell, & Gottman, 1979). Generally, these studies indicate that fathers interact less than the mothers. However, some primary caretaker fathers tend to spend more time with their children than fathers who are a secondary caretakers (Pedersen, Anderson, & Cain, 1980). Nonetheless, in each case, fathers engaged in more playful activities than mothers; whereas, mothers engaged in more directional activities or learning new information (Lamb, 1980).

In examining marital interactions, Notarius and Johnson (1982) found that wives used less neutral and more negative speech behavior than their husbands in a marital dispute, and wives also reciprocated their husbands' negative speech. In addition, husbands had a greater tendency to show physical responses to their wives' negative speech. However, familiarity in the marital relationship was associated with marital satisfactions rather than personal efficacy (Sillars, Pike, Jones, & Murphy, 1984; Sillars, Weisberg, Burggraf, & Wilson, 1987). Moreover, resource exchange and overall happiness is related to reported feelings of partnership and mutual respect (Rettig and Bubolz, 1983; Witkin et al., 1983).

As the size of the interaction increases, from dyad to triad and greater, the pattern of interaction becomes more complex. More importantly, although other familial triad and larger groupings have been studied, the amount on research on this area is limited. Lewis and Feiring (1982) found that family size influence the father's role in the mealtime interaction involving parents and several children. Fathers were actively parenting children when the number of children increased from 3 to 5 children.

Lamb (1980) found that infants interacted more with either parent in isolated dyads than when the parent-child dyad was embedded within the entire family. Parke and O'Leary (1975) reported that the mothers interacted more with infant when the father was present than when the father was absence. Likewise, Rosenblatt (1979) found that the presence of at least one child affected the amount interaction between the parents.

This study represents a social interaction analysis of the impact of family structure and grandmother's residence on familial interaction patterns. Specifically, 50 families representing four types of Black families according to a factorial design based on family structure and grandmother's domicile were analyzed. Assuming that the interactions within a family are functionally related to each other, it was expected that various dyadic asymmetric interaction patterns would occur as a function of the numbers of adults and children in the household. Dyadic asymmetric interaction patterns are those patterns among the family members where a particular subset of speakers has higher frequency of interchanges than another speaker or other subset of speakers. Based on a previous work (Wilson & Tolson, 1986), directional hypotheses suggest three types of interaction patterns will emerge from the four types of families: (1) a symmetric interaction pattern in which the child(ren) and adult(s) had an equal opportunity to converse with one another would occur in dual-parent grandmother present; (2) a dyadic asymmetric interaction pattern in which adults talk more frequently to each other than to the child(rėn) and the children talk to adults and not to each other would occur in single-parent grandmother present and dual-parent no grandmother present families; and (3) a focal asymmetric interaction pattern in which the single adult in mother only families, would be the first and second speaker more often than their family members. The null

hypothesis is that family interactions fit a homogeneous pattern in which adults and children have equal opportunity to interact.

Method

Participants.

Fifty Black families who have completed four videotape observation sessions of their evening meals were used for this study. The families were recruited in a rural southern university community of 90,000 people to fit into a 2 x 2 factorial design of family structure (single vs. dual parent) by grandmother's domicile (residing with the family vs. residing at least 10 miles away). In addition, all participating families had at least one child between the ages of 8 and 12 years old.

Sample Demographic Information

The families were recruited from Charlottesville-Albemarle County, Virginia, an area that contains about 100,000 people living a urban/rural setting. The families were well distributed in whether they lived in rural or urban part of the area.

Table 1 presents the demographic information on the participants according to family type and grandmother's residence. These data included age and education of parents, family income, and family's per capita income (the family income divided by the number of family members dependent on the income).

Insert Table 1 about here

Using analysis of variance procedures and reporting differences significant at least at $p < .05$ level, two-parent family types had significantly more family income, more income per capita, more persons dependent on that income, and more highly educated

fathers than did single-parent family types. Compared to two-generational families, three-generational families had lived in their current residence longer, had more additional household and family members present, (beyond mother, father, grandmother and all children, and fewer children.

The sample can be characterized as lower middle-class with a mean income of $14,750; 2.4 children whose mean ages were 9.5 years; and with no additional adults present beyond mother, father, and/or grandmother. The parents were generally in their mid-thirties and high school graduates (64.9% of the parents had at least a high school degree). In comparison to 1985 census, 65.7% of the parents of Black children in the United States had at least a high school degree and their families reported a mean income of $14,855 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986). Thus, the socioeconomic status of this sample is comparable to that of Black families in the United States.

Procedure

The Family Interview

All families were identified through referrals from an informal network of church groups and friends. If they agreed to participate, an appointment was arranged for the entire family. Participants were told that the study investigated functional aspects of Black family life and that they would be interviewed to document their family life.

The initial interview was conducted in the families' homes in the evening. The initial interview lasted approximately an hour and one-half and consisted of a variety of behavioral, self-report, and demographic measures administered separately. After an initial self-report interview, four videotaping sessions of the family's evening meals were completed. The families were requested to adhere to certain rules during the filming of the evening meals in order to facilitate family interaction and minimize interruptions.

The rules were: (1) Everyone in the household must be present at every filming. (2) The family was limited to one room while filming. (3) No television or radio may be operating during filming. (4) No guests at the meal. (5) Briefly answer incoming telephone calls and no outgoing telephone calls. (6) No talking to the research assistants once the filming begins. Each filming session was arranged at the family's convenience, to coincide with their normal evening mealtime. The film session lasted as long as it took the family to eat their meal, generally 25 to 35 minutes. The families were paid $125 for their completion of the initial interview session and all four filming sessions.

Data Coding. The unit of analysis was a randomly selected two minute interval. The data were coded in each time frame by scoring the order in which persons spoke or held the floor. Each family member was assigned a number, and within each frame the coder sequentially recorded the number of the person who spoke first, the person who spoke second, and so on. Thus, no affective or behavioral content codes were used. This method of coding provides both a record of the number of times a person held the floor, referred to as speakerships, and the number of floor switches that occurred within a frame. For each family, at least 50 speakerships were coded to establish the interaction patterns and functional relationships between the adults' conversation and the children's conversation. The coding reliability was established by using interjudge Cohen's Kappa reliability procedures of greater than .80.

Results

The relative frequency of each members interaction was considered. Figure 1 shows the total adjusted frequency of each member's speakership for all families (in percentages). The data shows that adults talked more frequently than children.

Mothers tended to initiate the most speakerships. Grandmothers generated the second most speakerships, followed closely by father and target children. Next oldest child and youngest child were last.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Lag sequential statistics of the speakerships using the Allison and Liker (1982) z-score computation of the Elag Program (Bakeman, 1983) were computed. Table 2 presents the outcome of those computations. The results indicate that, in general, mothers' conservation was effected by the presence of adult role members. Children spoke to their mothers more often than any one else.

Insert Table 2 about here

For the single-parent-no-grandmother-present families, the children interacted much more often with their mother than with each other (see Figure 2). The focal asymmetric interaction pattern, in which a single family member is the speaker and receiver more frequently than any other member, is evident these families. Mother to child interactions and child to mother patterns occur significantly more than expected.

Insert Figure 2 about here

In dual-parent-no-grandmother-present families (see Figure 3), the children's patterns are the same as in the single-parent-no-grandmother-present families, expect fo r

a slight difference where the youngest child speaks to the target child slightly more than expected. Mothers' conversation patterns are altered by the presence of the father. Mothers direct significantly more than expected conversation to fathers. Mother to target child patterns are still significantly more than expected; however, mother to next oldest child and youngest child is no longer significant. Because children primarily have not changed their pattern, mother is still the focus of these families. Therefore, these families also appear to represent the focal asymmetric interaction pattern.

Insert Figure 3 about here

In single-parent-grandmother-present families, not only has the mothers interaction pattern changed, but the children's patterns change as well (see Figure 4). With the presence of the grandmother as the second adult, grandmother to mother, as well as, mother to grandmother interactions occurred more frequently than expected. However, no child to mother pattern is significant. The dyadic asymmetric interaction pattern, in which two family members speak to each other more frequently than other family members, can clearly be seen in these families.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Finally, for dual-parent-grandmother-present families (see Figure 5), mothers interact with their children and children with their mother significant more than expected. This dyadic asymmetric pattern is not as clear, however, as in the single-parent-grandmother-present families.

Insert Figure 5 about here

Another interesting finding was that in dual-parent-no-grandmother families, fathers tended to generate silences. That is, a silence (3 second interval in which no one speaks) occurred after a father spoke significantly more than expected, prob. = .155 with a z-score of 3.15.

Discussion

In all family situations, mothers are the center of conversations. This is clear in looking at frequencies of interactions and patterns. Children tended to talk more often to their mothers than anyone else. That is, compared to children-mother interactions, children conversed less often with other children or other adults than with mother. These patterns replicate Wilson and Tolson's 1986 study.

Specifically, of the several asymmetric interaction patterns observed, the one involving the single adult-multiple children is the most interesting. In this family, the mother led the conversation and was the focus of conversation much more frequently than any of her children. Over a long time period, a single adult with several elementary-school children could become highly stressed by this constant demand for attention. Other researchers (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978; McLanahan, Wedemeyer, & Adelberg, 1981) have also discussed the potential impact of this stressful family situation on children's social adjustment. They have suggested that the single mother is overwhelmed by the children's constant demand for attention and thus can only respond to children's inappropriate behaviors. In addition, the children are more

likely to assume adult tasks and responsibilities because not enough adults are present to take care of all the familial demands (Lee, 1977).

With the presence of another adult, the mothers attention is drawn away from the children. However, even though mother to father patterns were significantly more than expected, father to mother patterns were not. However, the father-silence and silence-mother indicate that fathers are interacting, although they tend generate more silences in the dual-parent no grandmother situation. Furthermore, some child to mother interactions were more frequent than expected. The high rate of children to mother interactions seems to be a reflection of the children successful attempts to draw mothers attention to them.

When a grandmother is the other adult in the family, mothers do not change their interaction pattern toward the other adult; however, grandmothers' interaction pattern is different from fathers' pattern. Grandmothers talk to mothers significantly more than expected. With this increased competition for the mothers attention from another adult, neither mother to child nor child to mother interactions reach significance. This result may be an outcome of the female family members tendency to talk more than male family members (McLaughlin, 1984). Nonetheless, it appears that grandmothers are able to draw mothers attention away from the children. In the various dyadic-asymmetric interaction patterns, z-scores between adults were higher than z-scores between adults and children.

These findings are consistent with Lewis and Feiring (1982) who investigated mealtime interaction middle-class White American families. They observed that family size had a pervasive impact on familial interactions. In their study, fathers activity level and parenting function increased as the number of children increased. Although

mothers were the clear focus of mealtime interactions the increase number of children necessitated that fathers take a more direct role in parent-child interaction.

This study is consistent with others that have considered the role of extended family members in childrearing. Martin and Martin (1978) discussed the additional resources which the extended family offered the dependent family unit. Family units which were in a crisis situation could rely on the extended family for childrearing assistance and other material support. The availability of an additional adult appeared to be the most important aid provided. Hale (1982) indicated that the mother's mother took a much different role in Black families than in white families. The Black grandmother was more likely than her white counterparts to live in close proximity to her daughter's family of procreation, to care for her grandchildren, and to provide financial aid to her daughter.

Further support is provided for clinical interventions which are directed at developing the familial networks of single mothers. A crucial factor for single mothers with multiple children is developing and maintaining supportive relationships with other adults. Another factor that may help mitigate the problem of parental aloneness is the present of an older child who could act as a parent and a supportive adult.

Familial interaction provides an essential background for the development of strong, loving family relationships. A lack of familial interaction can be associated with a lack of understanding of a person's desires and positive/negative feelings. A family which communicates effectively and constantly can be said engaged with one another and in a good position to encourage support and interact with each other in a positive manner. Familial interaction styles vary from person to person and it is important to be able to understand and to respond to different familial interaction patterns in order to

interact with others. In addition, different familial interaction styles have various implications for the maintenance of good relationships. This study did provide some interesting patterns which were consistent with the findings of the other studies and it furnished a foundation from which to do more complex analyses.

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Table 1

Demographic Information of Family Structure and Grandmothers Residence

Grandmother's Residence and Demographic Averages	Structure of Family Unit: Single Mean	Single Range	Dual Mean	Dual Range
Living with the family:	n = 13		n = 6	
Age of mother	32	26-43	36	24-43
Age of father	37	31-43	39	34-46
Education level of mother[a]	3.6	1-7	3.0	2.5
Education level of father	2.4	2-3	2.5	2-5
Family income	$8,892.	$2,224.-$15,000.	$15,822.	$2,224.-$27,000.
Family's per capita	$2,964.	$556.-$6,000.	$5,089.	$741.-$12,000.
Residence	10 years	28 years	13 years	37 years
Number of children	2	1-3	2	1-4
Age of Grandmother	59	44-74	62	52-72
Number of other relatives	1	0-4	.7	0-2
Living in the local community:	n = 20		n = 11	
Age of mother	34	24-52	34	24-55
Age of father	34	21-57	36	24-54
Education level of mother	3.4	1-7	3.6	1-7
Education level of father	3	1-5	3.6	1-7
Family income	$10,566.	$2,224.-$18,000.	$20,959.	$2,224.-$36,000.
Family's per capita	$3,469.	$556.-$9,000.	$5,089.	$741,-$12,000.
Residence	4.3 years	0-7 years	5.6 years	0-33 years
Number of children	2.5	1-6	2.7	1.6
Age of Grandmother	59	47-54	63	50-82
Number of other relatives	.38	0-4	.17	0-1

[a]Education level: 1 = grade school, 2 = some high school, 3 = high school graduate, 4 = trade school graduate, 5 = some college, 6 = college graduate, and 7 = graduate school.

Table 2

SINGLE-PARENT-NO-GRANDMOTHER

FIRST SPEAKER	NEXT SPEAKER	PROB.	Z-SCORE	SIGN.
mother	target child	.362	6.73	*
	next oldest child	.251	4.45	*
	youngest child	.172	3.57	*
	grandmother			
	father			
target child	mother	.554	7.13	*
	next oldest child	.195	.79	
	youngest child	.099	-.26	
	grandmother			
	father			
grandmother	mother			
	target child			
	next oldest child			
	youngest child			
	father			
father	mother			
	target child			
	next oldest child			
	youngest child			
	grandmother			
next oldest child	mother	.396	4.10	*
	target child	.174	.49	
	youngest child	.118	.48	
	grandmother			
	father			
youngest child	mother	.262	3.05	*
	target child	.116	.22	
	next oldest child	.109	-.39	
	grandmother			
	father			

SINGLE-PARENT-GRANDMOTHER-PRESENT

FIRST SPEAKER	NEXT SPEAKER	PROB.	Z-SCORE	SIGN.
mother	target child	.189	1.52	
	next oldest child	.110	1.40	
	youngest child	.027	.19	
	grandmother	.357	3.69	*
	father			
target child	mother	.368	.95	
	next oldest child	.054	-.72	
	youngest child	.020	-.29	
	grandmother	.288	.59	
	father			
grandmother	mother	.434	5.00	*
	target child	.162	1.18	
	next oldest child	.083	.71	
	youngest child	.027	-.27	
	father			
father	mother			
	target child			
	next oldest child			
	youngest child			
	grandmother			
next oldest child	mother	.263	1.50	
	target child	.088	.04	
	youngest child	.032	.33	
	grandmother	.091	.52	
	father			
youngest child	mother	.101	.96	
	target child	.045	-.12	
	next oldest child	.040	.02	
	grandmother	.076	.21	
	father			

DUAL-PARENT-NO-GRANDMOTHER

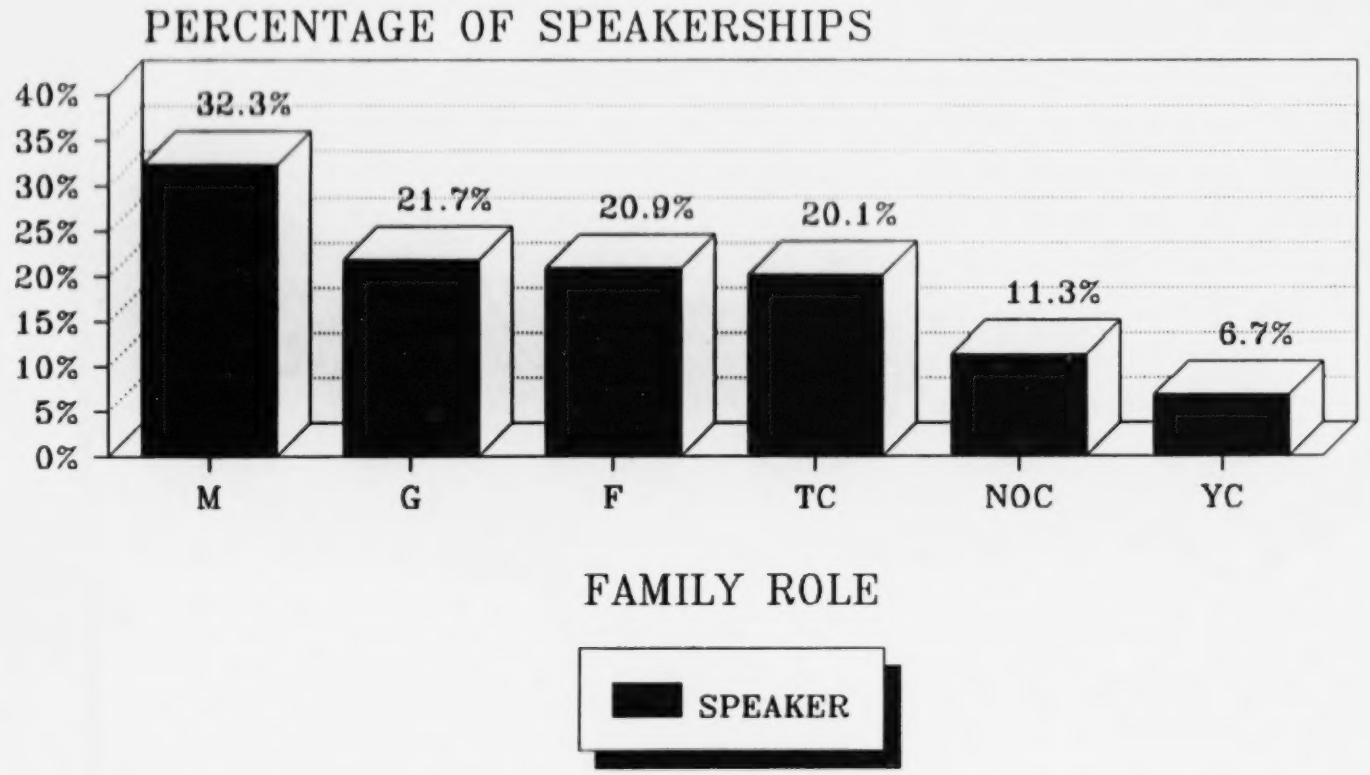
FIRST SPEAKER	NEXT SPEAKER	PROB.	Z-SCORE	SIGN.
mother	target child	.241	2.42	*
	next oldest child	.085	.05	
	youngest child	.073	.25	
	grandmother			
	father	.364	4.44	*
target child	mother	.418	3.20	*
	next oldest child	.088	.48	
	youngest child	.066	-.11	
	grandmother			
	father	.314	1.79	
grandmother	mother			
	target child			
	next oldest child			
	youngest child			
	father			
father	mother	.333	1.72	
	target child	.217	1.60	
	next oldest child	.090	1.34	
	youngest child	.092	.66	
	grandmother			
next oldest child	mother	.279	2.57	*
	target child	.072	-.37	
	youngest child	.064	.66	
	grandmother			
	father	.102	-.38	
youngest child	mother	.105	.25	
	target child	.121	2.08	*
	next oldest child	.037	.39	
	grandmother			
	father	.085	.11	

$p < .05$

DUAL-PARENT-GRANDMOTHER-PRESENT

FIRST SPEAKER	NEXT SPEAKER	PROB.	Z-SCORE	SIGN.
mother	target child	.271	2.99	*
	next oldest child	.094	1.01	
	youngest child	.026	.29	
	grandmother	.189	.26	
	father	.212	1.05	
target child	mother	.368	3.09	*
	next oldest child	.085	.51	
	youngest child	.000	-.29	
	grandmother	.168	.07	
	father	.219	.36	
grandmother	mother	.194	-.10	
	target child	.198	1.22	
	next oldest child	.000	-.56	
	youngest child	.046	1.02	
	father	.209	1.82	
father	mother	.279	.77	
	target child	.201	.69	
	next oldest child	.151	1.66	
	youngest child	.014	-.17	
	grandmother	.236	1.39	
next oldest child	mother	.121	.71	
	target child	.057	-.42	
	youngest child	.000	.00	
	grandmother	.000	-.58	
	father	.074	1.17	
youngest child	mother	.030	-.04	
	target child	.000	-.29	
	next oldest child	.000	.00	
	grandmother	.076	1.02	
	father	.015	-.48	

FIGURE ONE
FAMILY MEMBER INTERACTIONS



M= MOTHER G= GRANDMOTHER F= FATHER
T= TARGET CHILD NOC = NEXT OLDEST CHILD
YC= YOUNGEST CHILD

FIGURE TWO

SINGLE-PARENT-NO-GRANDMOTHER

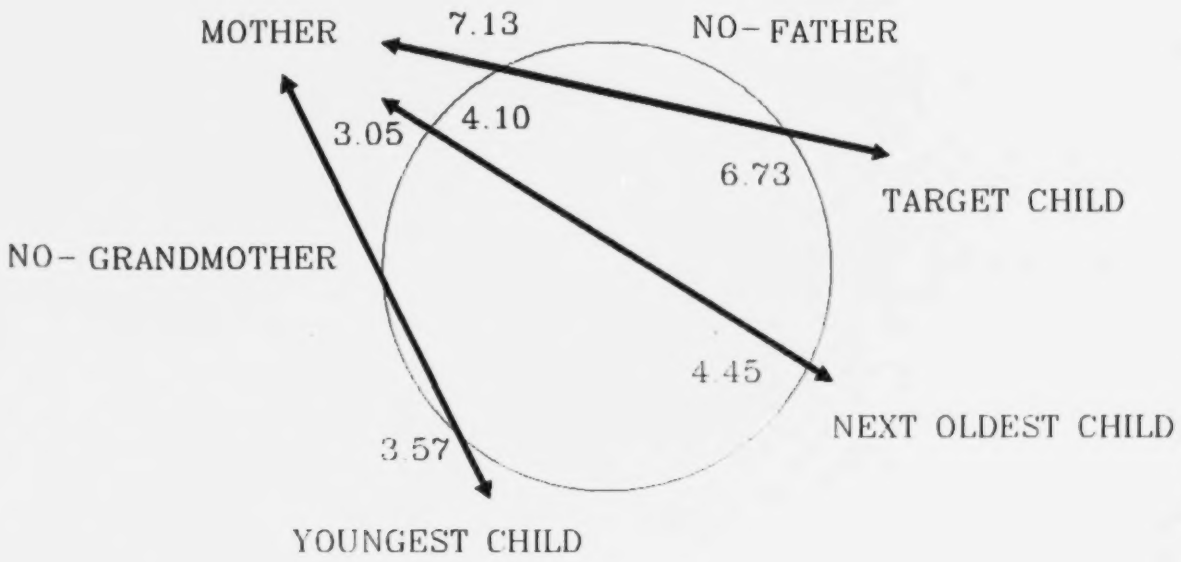


FIGURE THREE

DUAL–PARENT–NO–GRANDMOTHER

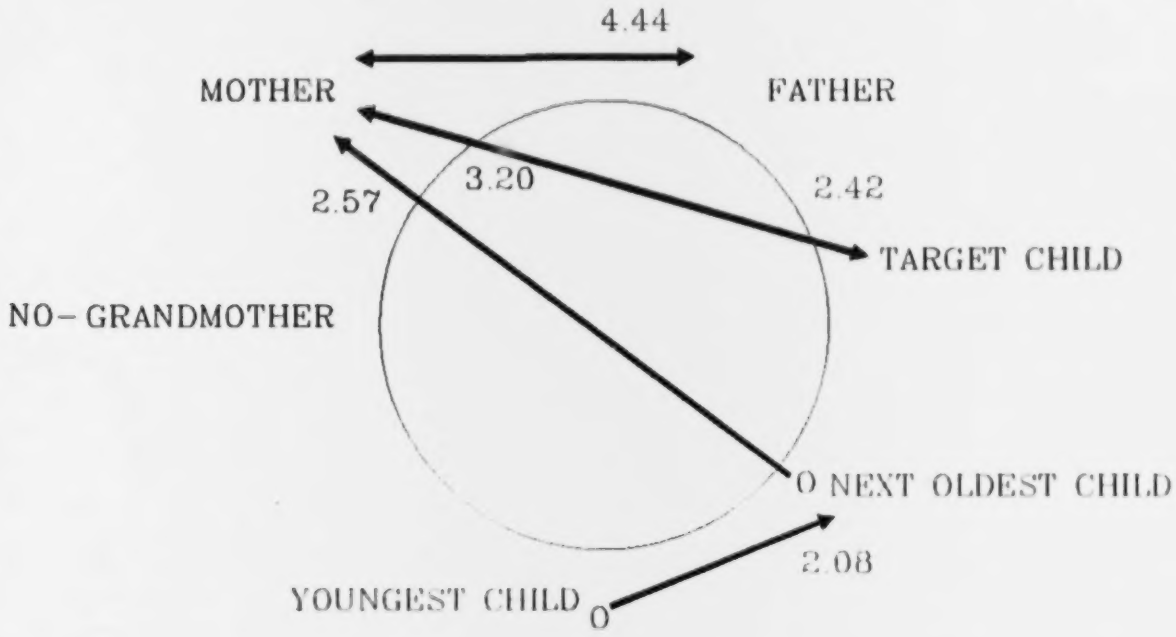


FIGURE FOUR

SINGLE-PARENT-GRANDMOTHER-PRESENT

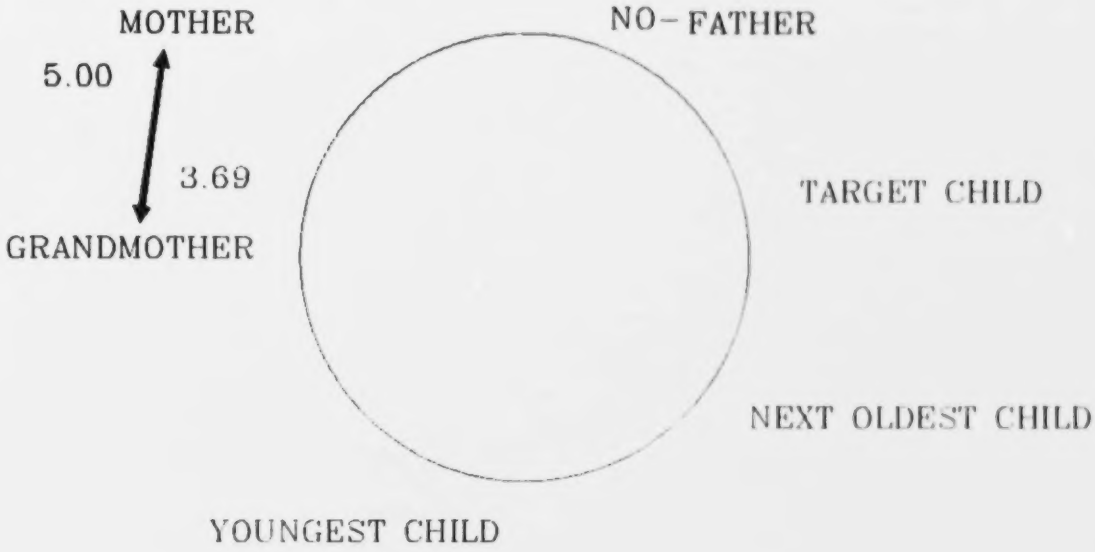


FIGURE FIVE

DUAL–PARENT–GRANDMOTHER–PRESENT